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Liz Przybylski

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*It is a warm evening on Chicago's far north side, and inside the club, bright lights continue well after dusk. The dark two-story room opens onto a raised stage that is alive with sound. Audience members congregate around small tables and cluster on the dance floor to get a better view of the musician in the front of the room. He looks out over the mic as he speaks directly to the crowd. He is dressed in cargo shorts and a T-shirt; a long dark braid pulls his hair tight, framing his youthful face. As the evening progresses, two brilliantly costumed dancers will take the stage. A hoop dancer wearing regalia will captivate the crowd with his skilled movements, and a flute player will bring an unexpected musical timbre to the audience's ears. The dance floor will fill, video art will be projected on a giant screen above the stage, and the volume will get louder. But for now, the musician's clear, unpretentious words fill the space, their meaning reflected on his face, and he appears above all straightforward and sincere.*

- 1 Frank Waln, a hip hop artist whose work takes inspiration from music of many genres, is opening for the soon to be internationally famous DJ trio A Tribe Called Red (ATCR). As a college student, he moved from his home on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota to the large and diverse city of Chicago. The three DJs of ATCR are on tour from Ottawa, where their monthly dance parties at Babylon Nightclub have spawned a new name for the electronic music they make together, powwow step. Artists seeking inspiration and trying out new combinations in front of audiences, these musicians are in many ways performing the most expected phenomenon that could occur at a small club like this one.

Yet even so, they articulate their artistic particularities. In many ways, Waln is an outsider: a Native musician among hip hop musicians, an artist from a reservation performing for an urban crowd, and frequently, a solo performer sharing bills with larger acts. ATCR foregrounds their urban performance, starting as they did throwing parties for largely Native crowds in a big city. They innovatively offer three different types of DJ set-ups simultaneously, creating sometimes-unexpected sounds as they project images taken from popular culture on screen. Playing with these images, ATCR contests their meaning, inviting audiences to be critical of cultural phenomena that reach beyond themselves.

- 2 Even as Waln tells his own story on stage, he is part of a larger story than just this stage, just this song, and just this city. Waln speaks often about his pride, his responsibility, and his excitement to be part of a larger set of Native professionals, part of a larger Native community. While he does sometimes say that he is at moments invisible in his adopted town as a Native man, he also takes center screen as a voice for concerns of young Native Americans in mainstream venues like MTV. This dance between feeling invisible and taking on a prominent media role links Waln and ATCR to a long history of urban Indigenous musicians in North America. Through a contextualized analysis, I will argue that this music is a contemporary iteration of a longstanding tradition of Indigenous survivance through musical practice. The music Waln and A Tribe Called Red bring to audiences from stage extends from the voices of musicians from generations past who tell their own stories and, at the same time, co-construct an American story from venues small and large.

## Urbanization: A Cultural Context

- 3 Urbanization is nothing new for Native nations. As Morgan Baillargeon reports, the establishment of semi-permanent to permanent dwelling was common for the Huronian, Iroquoian, Hopewellian, Mississippian, Mandan and Hidatsa, and Northwest Coast peoples “for thousands of years” (2013). Cities across North America have sprung up from places of exchange between Indigenous groups, a trend that began before the colonial project commenced. In this sense, the present expressions of Indigenous culture in cities are not a new project but a re-articulation of a long history of practices. At the same time, urbanization as a policy fits into an extensive history of government efforts to alter Indigenous cultures; it therefore has long been a justifiable subject of scrutiny.
- 4 In the United States, urbanization was proposed as one in a long series of strategies to assimilate Native Americans. Bringing individuals of diverse tribal backgrounds into cities and away from strong family bonds, it was assumed, would slow and eventually stop the elements of cultural learning and teaching that were keeping the cultures of North American Native Nations alive and distinct from those of non-Indigenous Americans. Andrew Armitage has described the colonization process as proceeding in five distinct phases: first institutional contact, then domination, paternalism, integration, and pluralism. Just as it did in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the process began in the United States with first institutional contact. As paternalism turned to integration, the reservation system was established, forcing the centralization of Indigenous communities and “freeing [Indigenous people’s] lands up for settlement” while acting as “disciplinary institutions, which gave power to the federal government to control Indigenous people’s time, space, personality, and values” (Armitage 1995 Pp. 73). In both the United States

and Canada, this system of control then paved the way for boarding schools. These non-voluntary schools “combined industrial and agricultural training for Indigenous children together with religious indoctrination” (Armitage 1995 Pp. 75).

- 5 The first boarding school opened in the United States in 1860 on the Yakima reservation; the opening of the off-reservation Carlisle Indian School in 1879 marked a new phase in federal assimilationist policy (Lomawaima, Child, and Archuleta 2002). Native American children were removed from their families and re-educated in residential schools. Children were forbidden from speaking their native languages, making the music of their parents, or continuing the religious practices of their upbringing (Child 1998). When the boarding school era deteriorated, efforts to minimize cultural differences between Native Americans and settler colonial society continued in new forms. Starting in the 1950s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs began to encourage the migration of Native American citizens to eight U.S. cities: Cleveland, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas, Oakland, Tulsa, San Jose, and Oklahoma City. From the beginning, some critics “felt the encouragement of Indian relocation by BIA officials was so strong that the program was, in effect, forced relocation” (Gundlach and Roberts 1978, Pp.118). The program’s emergence during the reservation “termination” phase in U.S. policy also made its goals suspect (Ibid., Pp.119). While each phase of the colonization process as described by Armitage undeniably had deleterious effects on social cohesion and the maintenance of healthy and distinct Native societies, the full assimilation that was attempted has not been realized. Through multiple relocations, Indigenous culture and community persists (Mucha 1983; DeLoria 1981). At every stage, individuals have found creative ways to resist the juridical structure imposed by government policies. Musical practices have been at the center of these innovative and ultimately resilient actions.

## Creativity and Indigenous Survivance

- 6 Shifts in Indigenous culture have been foretold by insiders since contact began. When boarding schools were established, Indigenous leaders warned about the changes that were to come. Luther Standing Bear was himself educated in European-derived music in a boarding school after having learned his own Lakota music and culture as a child (Standing Bear 2006, Pp. 226).<sup>1</sup> He reflected on the loss that was part of the process. Standing Bear remarked upon the importance of ceremony, as “through ceremony, obedience and allegiance to the supreme being were acknowledged and the traditions of the race kept alive; also, teachings, codes by which the manners and morals of the people were guided, custom, commandments, experiences and events of tribal importance were handed down from generation to generation in this form” (Standing Bear 2006, Pp. 213). Ceremonies, he explains, are an important way to embody “love for song, music, dance, rhythm, grace of motion, prayer, chant, ritualism, color, body decoration, and symbolic design” (Ibid.). He expresses frustration that at the time of the writing, which was originally published in November of 1931, “these ceremonies remain to the average person ‘heathen.’ Why more heathen to give thanks under the blue sky than under the roof of a man-made place of worship?” (Ibid.).
- 7 Explaining his understanding of Lakota songs in particular, he describes, “since song was the usual method of keeping the Lakota in touch with his Wakan Tanka<sup>2</sup>, it formed a large part of all ritual” (Standing Bear 2010 Pp. 214). Standing Bear, himself Lakota, describes how many Lakota songs are “dreamer songs received while in communion with spirits of

beings personified as humans. Some of the dreamers who brought songs to the people were the Elk, Duck, Thunder, Hawk, Wolf, Spider, Fox, Crow, and Stone. The wisdom of these beings was given to the dreamer in song and he in turn sang them to help his people” (2006 Pp. 214). The loss of song, then, was a loss of a source of help for the community.

- 8 In addition to dreamer songs, brave songs and lodge songs were part of Standing Bear’s life before he left for school. He remembers, “sometimes during the night or stillness of day, a voice would be heard singing the brave song. This means that sorrow was present—either a brave was going on the warpath and expected to die, or else a family member was looking for the death of some member of it. The brave song was to fortify one to meet any ordeal bravely and to keep up faltering spirits” (Standing Bear 2010 Pp. 217). Even as children were removed from their homes, Standing Bear recalls songs traveling with them. “I remember, when we children were on the way to the Carlisle school thinking that we were on our way to meet death at the hands of white people, the older boys sang brave songs so that we would all meet death according to the code of the Lakota—fearlessly” (Standing Bear 2010 Pp. 217).
- 9 While a separation from the musical culture of their families was a great loss, Standing Bear was one of many students who used the new music to tell stories in their own ways. While at boarding schools, many Indigenous children learned to play European instruments (DeLoria 2004). Young people not only learned technical proficiency on new instruments, but also played styles of music such as jazz which leant themselves to improvisation (Troutman 2009). In this way, boarding school students participated in the development of a distinctly North American style. Notable Tohono O’odham musician Russell “Big Chief” Moore learned trombone in boarding school; he went on to become a proficient and creative player. He collaborated with mainstream greats Louis Armstrong, performing big band music for a wide audience. Popular artist Jim Pepper, a musician of Creek and Kaw heritage, learned saxophone at school, and then went on to write his own popular music as an adult. Indigenous musicians like these have had a deep influence on mainstream American musical culture.
- 10 Throughout the contentious process of boarding school music learning, young students took control of the music they made. In example, many children were educated in European music at a boarding school on the Nez Perce Reservation starting in 1872 (Johnson 2010, Pp. 204). Johnson has documented the subsequent rise of dance bands among young musicians from this reservation in the twentieth century, including the Nez Perce Harmony Chiefs, The Lollipop Six, and the Nez Percians. Her interviews with members’ children recall the creativity of their parents. Nez Percian Tony Whitman’s son Silas recalls how boarding schools offered the only opportunities for sanctioned music making for people of his father’s generation. As Johnson reports, “according to Silas, you had to make the music your own in order to express your deep feelings through it” (2010 Pp. 210). Bands performed for mainstream audiences at Wild West events, such as the Chief Joseph Days rodeo. These shows embodied an encounter between a mainstream idea of “Indianness,” which Nez Percian band members had learned how to perform, and the real lived experiences of Indigenous individuals whose musical lives had been profoundly altered by the America for whom they were performing. In this encounter, Nez Percians worked to control their own image and tell their story even as the musicians encountered mainstream stereotypes about what Native Americans would or should look, sound, and act like. While band members often chose to wear headdresses or buckskin dresses on

stage while performing for non-Native audiences, their children recall this as a strategic move. As Johnson cataloged, “in addition to being highly proficient on their instruments and in playing together, they also dressed well and took pride in representing the Nez Perce people in a dignified way in a region in which anti-Indian sentiment off-reservation had never been very subtle” (Johnson 2010, Pp. 210). Performing the depictions of “Indianness” on stage, the artists themselves made choices about how to dress and play music. While there were some limits to their abilities to completely re-cast these figures, they were able to counter some persistent stereotypes simply by playing contemporary music in a highly competent fashion.

- 11 This ownership and recasting of narratives extended to other genres of music as well. Classically trained musicians who also had some capabilities in heritage cultural practices were able to draw on both sets of knowledge in a way that was beneficial for stage careers. Yankton Dakota writer and musician Zitkala-Ša, for one, leveraged a background on violin from boarding school into her later work on opera composition. Also using musical education for professional success, Ojibwe tenor Carlisle Kowbawgam was one of many musicians who made a performing career in European music. Creek opera singer Tsianina Redfeather demonstrates a particularly notable case of leveraging a bicultural education to her advantage. She mastered the art of strategic movement between music that was coded as Native American and that which was coded as European American. The mezzo-soprano left the Oklahoma Territory for a vocal studio in Denver. She learned piano and then voice. Her career in front of mainstream audiences blossomed as she performed as a touring musician singing Charles Wakefield Cadman’s Indianist compositions. While Tsianina Redfeather gained a reputation for her vocal talent, she also developed a following based on her depiction of Indianist characters, culminating in her portrayal of the title role in the opera *Shanewis*.
- 12 Some Indigenous musicians who excelled in Western Art Music traditions chose to perform these styles while wearing costumes associated with Indianist characters. These strategic depictions confronted audiences with a juxtaposition that invited them to question the stereotypes they held. Redfeather learned to perform in a bel canto vocal style while dressing in beaded buckskin and braids, confronting audiences with the “Indian princess” figure for which she became known. As Deloria reports, “her authenticity was the show’s most valuable commodity, for now Cadman’s idealized melodies seemed to be coming directly from the Indian’s mouth. Tsianina’s performance struck many critics and utterly and completely Native.” (2004 Pp. 210). Yet, the juxtaposition she enacted forced many audience members to confront their own stereotypes about Native performers. After a Denver performance, an audience member remarked, “how strange for an Indian to sing so well” (Deloria 2004 Pp. 212).
- 13 It was by performing music associated with non-Native cultures in attire mainstream audiences read as “Indian” –and doing so with remarkable skill—that musicians like Redfeather and the Nez Percians confronted audiences with the falseness of their own stereotypes of Native musicians and music. Redfeather demonstrates a trend for bicultural musicians of her day that continues into the present: encountering mainstream ideas of what a Native musician would look, sound, and act like, she twisted the script and performed a competent figure who could and did shape shift between worlds. In so doing, Redfeather and musicians who followed demonstrated the falsity of mainstream stereotypes through their performance choices. Extending from a history of musical creativity in the face of attacks against culture and community, Waln and A Tribe Called

Red continue in the legacy of musicians like Luther Standing Bear, the Nez Percians, and Tsianina Redfeather, who have co-created a culture of survivance.

- 14 In her poem “What is the Sound of America?,” Tiffany Midge imagines Chief Joseph’s encounter with Dixie-land jazz, ragtime, and the Bible. She writes, “this is what happened when the missionaries tried to convert our heathen souls: The Lollipop Six, Nez Percians, Jack Teagarden, International Sweethearts of Rhythm.” Quoting the sounds of jazz and of a 49’er, she writes, “Survivance. This is the sound of Survivance” (Johnson 2010 Pp.198). Survivance in this sense is an active process of cultural survival. This oppositional activity often involves storytelling and musical creativity; it encompasses individuals and communities using a variety of tools, including humor, music, and the creative re-fashioning of lessons learned through European-American schooling.

## Survivance and Storytelling in the Music of Frank Waln and ATCR

- 15 Facing misperceptions that would have been familiar to Redfeather, Waln reports, “as Indigenous people, we’ve been dehumanized” (Luther 2014a). Clearly aware of the stereotypes around him, Waln addresses these head-on. His song “AbOriginal” juxtaposes his upbringing on the reservation with his life in the city as a young man. In verse two, he narrates his encounter with a lack of understanding in an urban setting: “No one understands me like my people, these white kids don’t know my struggle. I ain’t equal in their eyes and their intolerance brings me troubles.” Specifically referencing the kinds of stereotypes around him, he continues, “I’m not their noble savage. Doing damage to their perception of who I am.” In light of this, he must construct his own sense of self: “Self-destruct when I self-construct my own plan of my identity from their affinity. To raping culture, they rape the land, shame an Indian just to save the man, but this Indian never dies” (Waln 2013a). Increasing in volume, Waln repeats the word “dies,” and the verse ends with a loud intonation of the word “rise!”
- 16 While part of a project that actively combats stereotypes through performance choices, Waln’s musical creativity has also formed a process of working through situations in his life. Like so many artists, Waln’s music springs from personal experiences and acts as creative response. Frank Waln began producing music on a laptop in his home on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. Largely self-taught, he saved his money to buy the necessary equipment and developed skills as a producer working on a computer in his room. He then started making music with Kodi DeNoyer, Andre Easter, and Tom Schmidt, forming the group Nake Nula Waun. Soon after they began, the group won best rap/hip hop recording at the 2011 Native American Music Awards for their first album, *Scars and Bars*. The album was self-produced and independently released. The personal experiences of the group members are heard across the album. In particular, the song “Heavy,” the fourth on the album, conveys sincerity through its direct approach. It uses three-note repeated synth melodies to provide structure. The unobtrusive instrumentation allows the listener to focus on the rapped lyrics and the sung chorus, which repeats, “I carry a heavy load, got me on my knees, begging please, somebody help me out. Cause this game and this life, it ain’t easy. But my soul is alright.” Fellow MC Andre Easter narrates a story about losing touch with his family, then Waln describes mourning a lost loved one. “It’s your voice I hear every time I speak, I wish you were here



every time I'm weak" (Nike Nula Waun 2010). Far from existing separately from his political project, this direct processing of important life events is part of Waln's public performance. He brings this kind of personal relevance and emotional response to his work on community-based concerns.

Waln's music reflects his viewpoint on socio-political issues that affect his community, and acts as his response to them. When asked why he chose to address the Keystone pipeline, Waln replied,

I'm from the Rosebud reservation, and the Pine Ridge reservation is like 30 miles west of us, but we're all Lakota, we're the same band, just different reservations. They were trying to build it [the pipeline] from the Pine Ridge Reservation. And no one back home wants it. And there was a specific event, a specific video on YouTube, about these Keystone trucks that were trying to drive through, kind of like a road that's between the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations, and people from both reservations protesting it to stop the trucks. I'm talking like kids, elders, and there's a video of this 90 year old grandmother talking at the protest, she's saying you know, 'this is your land, *takoja*,' which means grandchild, 'I'm 90 years old out here protecting, I'm not going to be here forever. You need to stand up. What are you going to do?' And it was really inspiring to me (Waln 2013b).

- 17 Waln describes, "the song 'Oil 4 Blood' came about from seeing the resistance back home that really inspired me." He explains that the song "tried to capture that spirit of resistance." Waln elaborates, "I had the concept of wanting to write a song addressing the Keystone pipeline floating around in my head for like 3 or 4 months. And I went back home to the reservation in the summertime and I actually had some time. ... So the concept was festering and boiling in my head for many months. And it was just that passion of, oh I want to be there with my people, but I couldn't so I wrote a song about it" (Waln 2013b).
- 18 Conscious of his opposition to mainstream viewpoints, Waln's music expresses a commitment to community. In this instance, Waln chose to share his personally-felt beliefs about land as it pertains to the pipeline though the project had support from many figures in business and industry. In the music video he co-directed and edited, Waln first appears on screen blindfolded with a flag, hands tied, and gagged with the letters "NDN" scrawled over his mouth. The chorus, sung in Waln's voice but mouthed by a succession of actors in the video, repeats, "(Keystone) everything's red, (pipeline) now everything's dead" (Waln and BazilleDX 2013). At the end of the video, a pair of small hands removes the flags from his hands and eyes, and takes the tape off his mouth. The last image shows a child handing the rapper a microphone, from which, now unmuted, he will presumably continue to share his message. The song uses a sample from Robbie Robertson's *Music for the Native Americans*. Robertson's song "Mahk Jchi," released in 1994, marks an early attempt for the rock musician to write music that drew on his Mohawk heritage. Waln morphs Robertson's work into a beat that provides a very different soundscape.
- 19 Waln's public image as a hip hop musician extends beyond himself as an individual; the song "Oil 4 Blood" in particular solidifies the rapper's connection to his elders. Reflecting on the Keystone XL oil pipeline, Waln recalls, "my ancestors were told about this prophecy. They were told that this black snake would come through our land, and this snake would bring an evil and a sickness with it. And that snake would either bring the people together or tear the land apart and destroy everything" (Luther 2014a). Speaking at a moment when the pipeline was in the proposal stage, Waln suggested that this



“snake” was in fact bringing people together in opposition to the project. Groups blockaded roads to prevent the movement of parts and machinery, physically standing in the way of potential implementation of the project. At the end of verse one, Waln raps, “Make everything red, words of my ancestors up in my head.” Twice more he references his ancestors, finally ending verse two with an affirmation of his connection to them: “to my home and my ancestors I am loyal, build that pipeline and I’m burning down your oil” (Waln 2013c). Committed to his ancestors, Waln also takes on the responsibility of leadership in the contemporary moment. By performing at public events and speaking to the press, he calls attention to problems and proposes solutions. He explains, “I’m fighting for my mother, I’m fighting for my family, I’m fighting for everyone back home on my reservation, all those people who rely on me to be a voice for them. People have put me in this position, in this leadership role” (Luther 2014a).

- 20 Waln’s bicultural education emerges in his use of both mainstream popular music and the Lakota music he learned as a child in South Dakota. Waln discovered hip hop through CDs he listened to as a kid on his reservation. At the same time, he was learning traditional drum through his school (Waln 2013b). In his other music, Waln has worked with Lakota music specifically. “AbOriginal,” for example, samples Rabbit Dance, a kind of Lakota partner dance that has inspired other Indigenous dance music styles (Black Bear and Theisz 1976). In his stage performances, Waln collaborates with a variety of artists to bring multiple genres to his audience simultaneously. At the Chicago show, Waln rapped onstage, supported by the carefully crafted beats playing under his voice. Next to the artist, two guests complemented his work. The Samson brothers offered another dimension to the performance by playing flute and performing hoop dance. Clear treble melodies rose above Waln’s text, and an athletic dancer brought the storytelling dance to the club audience, augmenting the ways in which the spectators could learn from and appreciate the performance. While the stories told onstage included those of pain and loss, as Waln posits, “sometimes the bad stuff brings us together and provides us what we need to bloom and come back” (Luther 2014a). Orchestrating his own performance choices and collaborating with others, Waln synthesized traditional and popular forms for his own strategic and artistic purposes.

## A Tribe Called Red: Electric Powwow

*The DJs of A Tribe Called Red take the stage together, collaborating to manipulate sound in front of the dancing crowd. Audience members move to the beat, hands in the air, while a scene from a Western plays on loop. Three DJs work intently, manipulating instruments that overflow a long table with cables and controllers.*

*Each DJ works on an aspect of the sound. DJ Shub is known for his skill as a turntablist, Bear Witness often works with a MIDI controller, and DeeJay NDN creates engaging sounds with a CDJ. The video art projected on a large screen behind the three DJs is integrated into the media experience that the musicians curate. Looped sections of video from films, television, and even video*

*games play and re-play, distort, and recontextualize  
images of Indigenous actors in this club setting.*

- 21 Waln and A Tribe Called Red perform audibility in the contemporary moment. A history of moving Indigenous communities and Indigenous cultures into the physical margins in the U.S. and Canada has created a present in which some communities are not seen and heard by a wider mainstream. These musicians continue to work against the “Indianist” stereotypes that have changed surprisingly little since the time of Redfeather. Frank Waln has been influenced by ATCR, for whom he opened at the Chicago show. He explains, “It was A Tribe Called Red that made me realize that as a Native Artist we can break through the mainstream and not compromise. And they’re getting recognition all over the world” (Luther 2014a). The group is indeed gaining recognition within the music industry, and it is also consistently getting audiences involved at shows. Given this concern that Native artists, and Native people more generally, are only legible when embodying certain stereotypes, ATCR presents these stereotypes and flips them. Like Waln, the group recognizes that Indigenous culture is sometimes invisible in the contemporary moment, particularly in cities. Member Bear Witness articulates, “there’s been a long history of Indigenous people in urban settings. We’ve always been here.” He continues, “we’ve been invisible. We’ve been largely invisible because if you’re not wearing the beads, if you’re not wearing the feathers, if you’re not doing the things that have been made O.K. for Native people to exist as, then you become invisible” (Luther 2014b). This is consistent with Marianne Ignace’s work with Indigenous hip hop artists, which finds that artists making graffiti and rap music address themes that “include and reflect on intertextual references to Aboriginal traditions, the injustices of colonial history and the present conditions—often matters of life, death, and violence—that affect Aboriginal peoples on the rez, no longer insular but closely affected by the city” (Ignace 2011, Pp. 223). Using both visuals and music, ATCR creates their own image in an urban setting. Bear Witness explains, “we’re coming into a time where we’re starting to take control of our own image. A huge part of Tribe is representing ourselves. We’re trying to change the way that we are represented. We’re trying to change the way that we are seen” (Luther 2014b).
- 22 Demonstrating a creative take on Indigenous survivance in an urban setting, ATCR hosts Electric Pow Wow at Babylon Nightclub, which draws a large mixed crowd. Their music defies precise genre categorization. On the group’s Soundcloud page, ATCR labels their music with the tag line “Traditional Pow Wow music remixed with Dubstep” (A Tribe Called Red 2010). Sonically, ATCR presents music from many genres in a new way for audience members. The DJs offer innovative remixes, and creative, sometimes even humorous, transitions between a plethora of sounds when they perform. Songs on their first and second albums, *A Tribe Called Red* and *Nation II Nation* respectively, demonstrate how the artists incorporate non-electronic music into their new creations. While powwow music has a long and living tradition, ATCR works with contemporary recordings. With the permission of the label Canyon Records, ATCR remixed the drum group Northern Cree’s “Red-Skinned Gal” for their song “Red Skin Girl” on the album *A Tribe Called Red*. (A Tribe Called Red 2012). The Northern Cree Singers, a contemporary powwow group from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, incorporates members from other Cree nations. This remix brings the characteristic sounds of Northern Cree into a club dance setting.

- 23 Bicultural musical expression through collaboration also rings through “Bread and Cheese.” This song, on the album *Nation II Nation*, uses music from Black Bear Singers (A Tribe Called Red 2013). This group, whose members hail from the Atikamekw Nation in Manawan, Quebec, performs northern contemporary powwow music. They worked with A Tribe Called Red on the song, recording the vocals and drum parts separately in studio. Then, ATCR was able to work with the material. On “Bread and Cheese,” the singers’ voices enter gradually, increasing in volume as if arriving from afar. The DJs fade the singers in, and then the energy builds. The song modulates their voices, and then the dance beat takes up prominence again. As the song continues, a slow heavy duple dance beat continues underneath the drum group’s singing. The group’s drumming is highlighted at some sections of the song, while at others, it is the DJ-crafted dance beat that takes prominence.
- 24 As contemporary powwow and electronic music come together on “Bread and Cheese” and “Red Skin Girl,” ATCR performs a complex Indigenous identity for an urban crowd. The group carefully re-casts powwow into a club setting as it responds to the stereotypes that musicians hear and see around them. ATCR changes the style from the powwow genre to an electronic dance music, or dubstep, genre. This invites dancing in the club settings where the group typically performs, inviting a different kind of listening to the music. Audience members encounter a changed powwow music, often in urban centers, and consistently with a new organizing beat. The group regularly draws a mixed non-Native and Native crowd, engaging a diversity of listeners. Bear Witness, group member and skilled video artist, explains why work like this is necessary: “we’ve never been in control of our own image. It’s always been how we’re perceived through the lens of the colonizer” (Luther 2014b). Instead, the group strategically performs its own version of both Indigenous history and ongoing presence in North America.

## Conclusion

- 25 Placing the process of re-telling stories through musical creativity in its historical continuity demonstrates a living legacy of Indigenous musicians flourishing in mainstream culture as well as an ongoing practice of individuals presenting their own creative takes on socio-political events. As a reality of living with a hybrid culture, musicians express cultural particularity within a larger sphere of the musical mainstream. Using music and storytelling that began as embedded within a particular cultural sphere, rappers and DJs Waln and ATCR recall the geographic and social particularity of hip hop at the outset of this musical genre. Over time, hip hop entered the cultural mainstream. These artists are now re-purposing hip hop-derived styles to once again express cultural particularity; they perform their own kinds of Indigenous musical expressions within contemporary cities, thus bringing the movement full circle.
- 26 Like Native American jazz and classical greats, Frank Waln and ATCR confront audiences with multiple truths. Waln builds on his early success with a Native American Music Award, and now tours nationally and internationally. As he does so, he continues to incorporate musical signifiers of his Lakota heritage and connects these to contemporary socio-political concerns. Trio ATCR highlights members’ Indigenous ancestry, and uses contemporary powwow music to bring Indigenous cultural signifiers to audience members. At the same time, the music they create is in the style of electronic dance music, a kind of music that is generally associated with urban club settings. Rather than a

disconnect, the group makes this overlap appear seamless. Further, the DJs present their music with a mastery that is widely acknowledged. Like Redfeather, they demonstrate for audiences, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, that they are very skilled musical practitioners in their chosen genre, even though these genres are not often associated with Indigenous artists for mainstream audiences. Group member DJ Shub has prevailed in the DMC World DJ Championships, winning as the Canada Champion in both 2007 and 2008.<sup>3</sup> The trio is also winning mainstream accolades together. In 2014, ATCR won the JUNO award for Breakthrough group of the year, a category that is not specific to Indigenous musicians. Like Waln's early career awards show win, this recognition highlights esteem that is held for the group's musical skills. Significantly, this particular honor compares the group to non-Indigenous musical acts. In contrast to stereotypes that would cast Indigenous music as linked only to the past, Bear Witness explains, "our culture has always grown, our culture has always adapted. We're trying to get everybody else to catch up with where our culture is today. We've come to a point where we know what our identity is. We're trying to get everybody else to realize that we're not those stereotypes" (Luther 2014b).

- 27 This contemporary musician's remarks are startlingly similar to those of Luther Standing Bear from many decades ago. He intoned in 1931 that Native culture "must not perish; it must live, to the end that America shall be educated no longer to regard native production of whatever tribe—folk-story, basketry, pottery, dance, song poetry—as curious, and native artists as curiosities" (Standing Bear 2006, Pp. 258). Contemporary hip hop and electronic musicians, notably Waln and ATCR, are continuing to battle a stereotype that would cast Native culture as "curiosities." Presenting their own creative musical practices, they demonstrate to audiences that music can and does change with the times without losing connections to the expressive culture of the past. Social forces have created voluntary and involuntary cultural changes over time; ongoing musical practices demonstrate a long line of Indigenous musical survivance.
- 28 Returning home after boarding school, Luther Standing Bear recalls,  
when I came back to the reservation to resume life there, it was too late to go on the warpath to prove, as I had always hoped to prove to my people, that I was a real brave, however, there came the battle of my life—the battle with the agents to retain my individuality and my life as a Lakota. I wanted to take part in the tribal dances, sing the songs I had heard since I was born, and repeat and cherish the tales that had been the delight of my boyhood, It was in these things and through these things that my people lived and could continue to live, so it was up to me to keep them alive in my mind (Ibid. Pp. 236-7).
- 29 More than keeping cultural traditions alive in the mind, changing musical performances keep them alive as ongoing embodied practice. The history of musical creativity and agential storytelling across genres of Indigenous musical performance is perfectly in line with the work that Waln and ATCR are doing through contemporary performances. It is not surprising that this work would come from inside of hip hop. From its beginning, hip hop has offered a way to tell stories and offered a creative space for artists to play (Katz 2012; Schloss 2004). DJs innovated to be able to play and extend breaks to support the enthusiastic dancing of party-goers. Through contemporary popular music, these artists are continuing a legacy of creativity and challenge.
- 30 Historically the category of "Indian" has been constituted as singular and normalized through legal definition (Blackburn 2009). Artists like Redfeather and the Nezpercians learned to perform this identity, and in so doing, demonstrated that it was as much put

on as the outfits they wore on stage. As individuals, these artists, like other modern subjects, exist between multiple spaces and inhabit changing lived realities. I argue that there is a shift happening in the construction of contemporary Indigenous identities, one that takes its root in a longstanding practice of bicultural competence, that is now moving into a sphere of recognition. Multivocality in musical performance, notably the expression of multiple genres of music at the same performance and for the same audience, enacts this kind of change. Frank Waln and ATRC are bringing forward a long history of creative performance that reconceptualizes the way that contemporary Indigenous identities are articulated; these articulations have real consequences as the perceptions of Indigeneity shift into increasingly inclusive images that are more contemporary, more hybrid, more reflective of the lives of communities, including urban communities. The stories that musicians tell through performance participate in changing narratives of Indigenous communities in urban centers. These stories are reaching the ears of Indigenous and non- Indigenous listeners, and are sounding through mainstream American narratives.

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## NOTES

1. Standing Bear's reflections and descriptions characterize "Lakota tribal life—my life, and that of my ancestors, upon the plains of what are now the states our North and South Dakota" (Standing Bear 2006, Pp.226).
2. Standing Bear refers to Wakan Tanka as "God of the Lakotas" (Ibid., Pp.258).
3. DJ Shub has since left the group; the trio is now rounded out by Zoolman.

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## ABSTRACTS

Rapper Frank Waln and the DJs of A Tribe Called Red are gaining international attention for the way they mix Indigenous musical gestures with contemporary genres. While this creative

practice is just gaining mainstream recognition, I argue that this music is actually a contemporary iteration of a longstanding tradition of urban Indigenous survivance through musical practice. This article employs close readings and interviews to analyze contemporary forms of bicultural musical expression by these two musical groups. Contextualizing these performances within a history of Indigenous expressive culture in the North American musical mainstream, connections emerge between contemporary popular music practices and earlier musical performances of the boarding school era. Reading these as iterations of Indigenous survivance, the article investigates not only how the cultural forms shape other kinds of American music, but also how the artists have acted as agents to shape cultural expressions and challenge stereotypes of Native music and musicians. The music Waln and A Tribe Called Red bring to audiences from stage extends from the voices of musicians from generations past who tell their own stories and, at the same time, co-construct an American story from venues small and large.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** musique autochtone, survivance, créativité, hip hop, Frank Waln, A Tribe Called Red

**Keywords:** Indigenous Music, Survivance, Storytelling, Creativity, Hip Hop, Frank Waln, A Tribe Called Red

## AUTHOR

LIZ PRZYBYLSKI

University of California, Riverside